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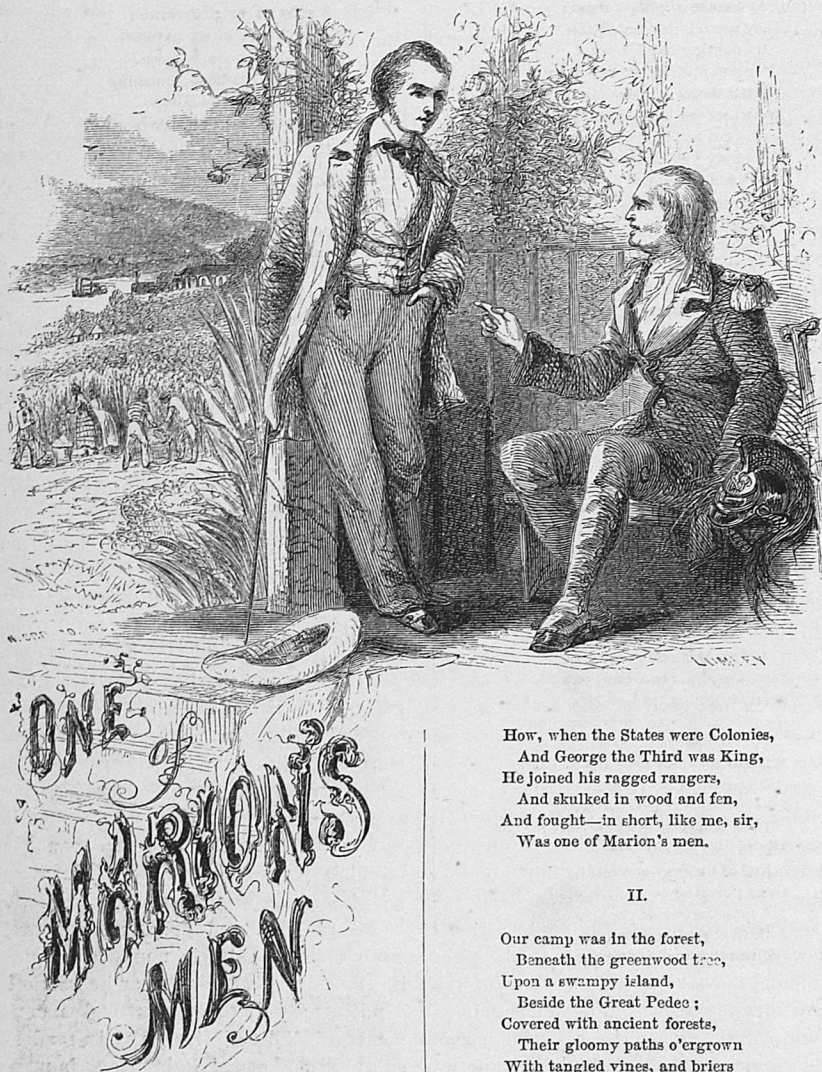
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THE BALLAD OF GAVIN JAMES.

By Richard Henry Stoddard.

I.

Of all our brave commanders,
 The generals of the South,
 No name like that of Marion
 Is in the people's mouth :
 The very children know it,
 We hush them on the knee
 With stories of his prowess
 Along the broad Santee.
 We still have men among us
 Who knew the General well ;
 And here and there a veteran
 Has still his tale to tell,
 (For age, you know, will babble)
 Perchance his song to sing,

How, when the States were Colonies,
 And George the Third was King,
 He joined his ragged rangers,
 And skulked in wood and fen,
 And fought—in short, like me, sir,
 Was one of Marion's men.

II.

Our camp was in the forest,
 Beneath the greenwood tree,
 Upon a swampy island,
 Beside the Great Pedee ;
 Covered with ancient forests,
 Their gloomy paths o'ergrown
 With tangled vines, and briars
 Whose purple berries shone,
 When through the darkness struggled
 The welcome light of day :
 Tall pines and massive cedars,
 The laurel and the bay ;
 Magnolias, sick with odor,
 And thick with swarms of bees ;
 And, bedded in the waters,
 The giant cypresses !
 With long and streaming mosses
 The ghostly trees were hung ;
 Like monstrous webs of spiders,
 The matted masses swung,
 So hideous when they brushed you,
 You felt that you were stung !
 Vines clambered up the branches,
 And clung to all they met,
 Until they meshed the island
 In one enormous net :
 So thick the muffled clusters,
 They dropped in pattering showers,
 Pelting the dogwood blossoms,
 The fairy jessamine flowers !
 You heard the chattering squirrels,
 And saw the scaly greaves

Of little glancing lizards,
 Run in and out the leaves ;
 And deadly Indian serpents,
 So beautiful to behold,
 Their heads like burnished copper,
 Their bellies burning gold !
 And startled alligators,
 With mingled roar and scream,
 Go crashing through the cane-brake,
 And splashing in the stream !
 A rank, luxuriant desert,
 A wild and savage den :
 This was the famous stronghold
 Of Marion and his men !

III.

We were a set of scare-crows,
 Dressed up in odds and ends,
 The plunder of our enemies,
 The gift of needy friends.
 Our swords were made of saw-blades,
 (We sacked the nearest mill)
 Great, clumsy, shapeless weapons,
 But sharp enough to kill !
 Our arms were rusty muskets,
 Old flint-locks, thrown aside—
 Whatever, sir, would carry
 A bullet, not too wide !
 Could you have dropped among us,
 You would have smiled to see
 Our free and easy living,
 Beneath the greenwood tree :
 Sitting in knots together,
 Or lying at our ease,
 Our sabres on the branches,
 Our guns against the trees ;
 Humming some hunting-chorus,
 Or hearkening to the shouts
 Of comrades in the distance,
 The whistle of the scouts ;
 Or hammering slugs in bullets ;
 Or handing powder round ;
 Or at our scanty dinners,
 (Our table was the ground)
 Alert as hounds, and eager,
 Our horses standing by,
 All saddled, bridled, ready
 For us to mount and fly !
 We used to mount at sunset,
 When Marion led the band,
 And swim the swollen rivers,
 And strike across the land :
 Skulking till dusk in by-roads,
 And dark and lonesome lanes,
 Among the woods and thickets,
 Among the swamps and canes.
 We waited not for moonlight,
 We took no beaten way,
 For when the General led us,
 We never went astray ;
 For he could read his courses
 By stars, and brooks, and trees,
 The notes of birds and insects,
 The whispers of the breeze !
 Ah ! well do I remember
 One hurried midnight tramp,
 To intercept the British
 Before they reached the camp.
 'Twas at the end of winter,
 Or had the spring begun ?
 About the first of March, sir,
 The year was eighty-one.
 We knew that they were coming,
 For we had trusty spies
 Between the camp and Camden,
 To save us from surprise ;

So off at once we started,
It was a cloudy night,
The stars were faint and straggling,
The moon not yet in sight.
We swam the creek in silence,
We reached a strip of plain,
And then, with one wild hallo,
We gave our steeds the rein!
We galloped to the southward,
And Marion kept the lead,
A shadowy Shape before us,
Upon a shadowy steed!
On, on, in thundering gallop,
That seems to shake the ground,
The night-wind in our faces,
The darkness all around!
At last the clouds are silvered,
The moon begins to shine—
And now we reach a forest,
A dreary waste of pine,
Dense, rugged, gloomy, pathless—
A matted growth below—
The den of wolves and foxes—
But crash, and in we go:
Crash, through the bending branches,
Whose spring, as we go through,
Half sweeps us from our saddles,
And drenches us with dew!
We hear the scream of night hawks,
The hooting of the owls,
The prowling wolves and foxes—
The startled forest howls!
O had we time and daylight,
To clear this devil's den;
But we've nobler game before us,
For we are Marion's men!

IV.

The flying hours seem minutes,
Full fifty miles are past;
The waning moon is setting,
The day is come at last.
It comes in blood-red splendor,
As such a day should come;
And hark! a distant bugle,
And hark again—a drum!
"They must be near," said Marion,
"I'll ride ahead, and see."
But while he spoke we saw them,
Along the broad Santee;
In front were Tory horsemen,
The British marched behind,
With glittering files of bayonets,
And banners on the wind!
Said Marion, "Horry, forward,"
And Horry shouted "Go;"
We drew our doughty sabres,
And swooped upon the foe.
They halted, turned ('tis said, sir,
That Watson was to blame),
But Richbourg blew his bugle,
And on, like fire, they came!
The furious shock of meeting
Was more than we could bear,
For, staggered like our horses,
We cut and thrust the air;
Nor fared the Tories better,
Or we had all been slain;
So both drew off in silence,
And galloped back again.
We rallied soon, and Marion
Rode out before us all,
So small, yet so heroic,
On his great sorrel, Ball!
"Be ready, men;" "We're ready;"
"Be steady, then," he said;

"Now charge!" And off we galloped,
With Horry at our head.
Again the Tories meet us,
And make a gallant stand;
They mean to test our mettle
By fighting hand to hand.
They cut, and thrust, and parry,
Their sabres fall like rain;
We wheel our horses nimbly,
And cut and thrust again.
We empty half their saddles,
But still they come to die.
We drive them back—they rally—
At last they turn and fly!
We hang, like death, behind them,
And slay them as they ride.
They scatter—we're among them—
They fall on every side,
Till, baffled by the British,
Who charge, we slowly yield,
And, with our sabres dripping,
Ride back across the field!
They wheel their guns against us,
The bull-dogs of the crown,
Before whose roar we scamper—
But some of us are down!
They're on us with their bayonets—
The Tory horse are nigh—
They form and charge together,
And now 'tis we who fly!
The ground was low and swampy,
And flooded at the time
With lakes of stagnant water
And pools of scum and slime;
But through it ran a causeway,
Some eight or ten feet wide,
O'er which our men were crowding
To reach the farther side,
Where stood their comrades shouting,
Drawn up in brave array;
Like droves of frightened cattle,
Their struggles block the way!
The British see our panic,
And as we sway and reel,
Come charging down upon us,
A bristling row of steel.
A thrill of fear, or courage,
Through all my pulses ran;

I turned and snatched a musket,
And fired and dropped my man!
A tall dragoon is on me,
A stalwart English clown;
A sharp thrust of my bayonet,
The tall dragoon is down!
He tumbles headlong, clutching
My bayonet as he falls;
The crack of twenty muskets,
The whizz of twenty balls!
I stagger in my saddle,
My horse is staggering too;
All's up with us, old fellow,
For we are riddled through.
But no—the curs have missed us;
Ye slaves of England, see!
There are some fifty of you,
To my good steed and me;
But I'd fight ye all, ye cowards,
Had I my bayonet free!
In vain I tugged and tussled,
I scarcely kept my seat;
And yet the man was dying
Beneath my horse's feet!
When all our men were over,
I wheeled about and fled;
A yell from Watson, "Shoot him!"
And fifty bullets sped:
I tumbled from my saddle—
They took me up for dead;
The General thundered "Forward!"
The British came, and then—
But you'll have to learn the rest, sir,
From some of Marion's men.

